

Bil Iechyd y Cyhoedd (Isafbris am Alcohol) (Cymru)

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan Gymdeithas Gastroenteroleg ac Endosgopi Cymru

Response from the Welsh Association for Gastroenterology and Endoscopy

WAGE Response to Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

1) Introduction:

The Welsh Association for Gastroenterology and Endoscopy (WAGE) represents healthcare professionals with an interest in hepatology in Wales. WAGE exists to promote improvements in the care of patients with gastrointestinal and liver diseases in the principality. WAGE welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on an extremely important public health matter.

2) The general principles of the Bill and the extent to which it will contribute to improving and protecting the health and well-being of the population of Wales

WAGE strongly supports the concept of MUP for alcohol as an effective measure to reduce alcohol related harm. Methods to reduce the harm that alcohol causes remain a vitally important issue given the 9% rise in alcohol related deaths between 2015 and 2016.

MUP is evidence based, and is thus not merely a highly sensitive measure but is also targeted to the population most at risk of alcohol related harm. As such MUP has the potential to benefit the health of the most economically deprived and vulnerable members of our society.

MUP introduction to Wales is estimated to result in 53 fewer death per year from alcohol and over 1,400 fewer hospital admissions. Importantly (and unusually for a Public Health measure), MUP's effect is rapid with a reduction in mortality seen within 6-12 months.

3) Any potential barriers to the implementation of the provisions and whether the Bill takes account of them

There are many misconceptions held by the wider public around the benefits and impacts of MUP and this is a barrier that needs to be overcome through ongoing clear communication with the public. One example of this is the fear that public houses and restaurants will be adversely affected – they may actually benefit, whereas supermarkets, and manufacturers of low-cost high-concentration drinks may suffer. Incorrect assumptions made about MUP will need to be strongly challenged using the clear evidence behind its benefits.

4) Whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill

There is an increased cost for moderate drinkers under a MUP plan but this effect is extremely small.

Those on lower incomes who do spend significantly more on alcohol under MUP are also those who are consuming hazardous amounts of alcohol and we therefore believe the health benefits of the reduction of consumption far outweigh concerns about the spending power of these individuals.

The final unintended consequence is the potential for negative perception among the general public which can impact on the acceptance of public health measures. The solution to this lies in engagement and education as per response to 3) above.